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How to make a cyanotype

Maria Politarhos
CUNY City College

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The Blue Print

How to make a cyanotype
Maria Politarhos



Fiorella Shalat

If you don't have access to a darkroom but you still like to make photographic images then cyanotypes or sun prints are the way to go. You expose the image to direct sun light and process it in plain running water.

Cyanotype is one of the easiest non-silver processes. Your images will be blue on any, preferably light color your background material happens to be. It works very well on acid free paper and on natural fibers like silk, cotton and linen. You may experiment with other than white backgrounds but keep in mind that all your highlights will be of that color.

You will need:

- a. Cardboard and plexiglass of the same size or a contact proofer to help you keep the negative or items to be used as original objects flat. Alternatively, you may just arrange objects directly onto sensitized material in which case you may not achieve sharpness.
- b. sensitizer
- c. running water
- d. peroxide or Clorox (optional)

Sensitizer

A quick search online will direct you to several vendors selling chemistry for cyanotype. The chemistry will be almost ready to use, you will only need to add water. If you never mixed chemicals before I would suggest you get what is available in the market.

If you prefer to make your own you will need:

Distilled water, Ferric Ammonium Citrate and Potassium Ferricyanide, two preferably brown glass bottles holding 10oz each.

Stock solution:

- A. Ferric Ammonium Citrate 50 grams to 8 oz. distilled water (mark as solution A)
- B. Potassium Ferricyanide 35grams to 8 oz. distilled water (mark as solution B)

Sensitizing your paper:

Under dim light:

Mix equal volume A and B in a small dish. Use this the same day. You may use an eye dropper if you only need to cover one or two 8x10 inch sheets of paper.

Apply the solution evenly with a brush, which does not have metal parts. You may also soak paper or fabric in a tray of solution. Dry the sensitized materials with a blow dryer. If you prefer to air dry it is better to leave them in total darkness.

Exposure

Blueprints (cyanotypes) need a lot of light. A bright sunny day is the best time to make a blueprint. You may also use fluorescent black light tubes or sunlamps or quartz lamps. You will need to test your light to determine the exposure time. While exposing to your chosen light source the coated material will change from light green to bluish grey and finally to blue green.

Wash

Use a tray and wash your exposed cyanotype in running water until all yellow stain is removed. The print will be a bit darker when dried. To achieve even darker blues and brighter highlights you may dip the print in a weak solution of Clorox or peroxide (1oz. peroxide or Clorox to 32 oz. water)

Second coats don't work well, as the new coat bleaches out the first image

Experiment with toning, hand coloring or anything else you think may work for you!



Justin Thorton
Marzagao

Keka